

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

her soul, which, " albeit it was not yet blessed, was so beautiful that no words could express." And, all this while, her conversation with the Divine Master and Spouse continued uninterrupted and increasingly ardent, although at times He came to her only in the guise of the beggar to whom she gave her cloak or the silver cross of her chaplet. "Taught, nay, rather compelled by her supreme Teacher, she learned every day more and more both to enjoy the embraces of the celestial Bridegroom in the bed of flowers, and to descend into the valley of lilies to make herself more fruitful, nor ever to leave or lessen the one for the sake of the other." *

Though suffering intolerable pains in her whole frame, she impressed all who approached her by her constant mirthfulness, her never-failing high spirits, her radiant happiness. " She was always jocund and of a happy spirit," says one of her intimates, " and especially when held down by any sickness ; while that lasted, she was ever all laughing in the Lord and exultant and rejoicing." ² To those who criticized her almost entire abstinence from human food, she would answer humbly : " God for my sins has smitten me with a singular infirmity, by which I am totally prevented from taking food ; I would eat right willingly, but cannot. Pray for me that He may forgive me my sins, because of which I suffer every ill." ⁸

From the beginning to the end of her life, Catherine desired to be subject to all, even to the servant in her father's house and the poor she encountered in the streets or in the hospital. She, in all sincerity, regarded herself as the vilest of creatures, and desired to be treated as such ; again and again, we shall find her asserting that her sins are the cause of all the evil around her, and almost that she alone is responsible for all the corruption of the world. She would fain have her faults judged by comparison with the graces she received. " If I were perfectly inflamed by the fire of Divine Love," she said once to Fra Raimondo, " and

¹ *Legenda*, II. ii. 4 (§ 130).

² *Contestatto Fr. Thomae Caffarini, Processus*, col. 1258. ⁸ *Legenda*, II. v. 9 (§ 174).